

Tracy Press

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Now that 2012 is behind us and the new Congress has begun, it is time to think about our priorities and challenges in the coming year. It is an honor to again have the privilege of serving our area in Congress, and I've been meeting with local leaders and citizens to hear about shared goals for our community.

As we all know, the Central Valley continues to be hard-hit by the economic crisis and the housing meltdown. Our unemployment rate continues to be far higher than the national average, small business owners are struggling, and we have a staggering crime rate that puts any economic recovery at risk. In the coming months, addressing these issues will be some of my highest priorities.

Bolstering our economy and creating family-wage jobs is no small task. Safety is a driving factor of development, so first and foremost, we must get our crime rate under control. I am proud that I helped bring back \$8 million in COPS grants, creating and preserving dozens of local law enforcement jobs. I will continue to support our law enforcement agencies and identify opportunities to secure federal funding. We need our streets to be safe so that business owners and entrepreneurs are attracted to our region and want to invest in the area that we all know has such great potential.

Another critical aspect of our local economy is our public schools. With a strong education system, the business owners and investors we are trying to attract will want to live here and raise their families here, and the more attractive our workforce will be to business owners.

At the heart of getting our economy back on track is creating good-paying, family-wage jobs. On the first day of this year, the president signed a law that included a section I wrote to reauthorize the United States Fire Administration, which authorizes needed funding to help hire and retain first-responders throughout the country. Ensuring that our fire departments have the resources they need for the next five years is imperative to preserving many of the steady jobs we need in our region.

Creating jobs in the valley is something I've focused on since first taking office in 2006, and it will remain one of my highest priorities. I successfully brought a new veterans' medical clinic and nursing home to San Joaquin County, a facility that will create 900 local jobs. This is just one example of what we need here in the valley to improve public services and create jobs.

Many of you may know of my personal commitment to serving our nation's veterans. My own

son, Michael, inspired me to run for office when he was stationed overseas. He called me up and said, "Dad, I think you should serve our country by running for Congress."

Coming from a family filled with veterans, I believe we have a solemn responsibility to provide the services our veterans have earned, and more. As they come home, I am committed to helping them find jobs and successfully transition their considerable skills to the civilian workforce.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention another top local priority, fighting against any plan that would divert water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and send it to Southern California. We depend on a healthy and thriving Delta to support our local farmers, small business owners, and families. I will continue to oppose any plan that would devastate the Delta, costing us countless jobs and destroying our local economy.

In the year ahead, I will work in Congress to bring more attention to the needs of the Central Valley and increase bipartisan compromise for people throughout the country. I look forward to working across the aisle to address the challenges we all face. Only then will we find true commonsense solutions to get our economy back on track, shore up the housing market, address our crime rate, and create the good-paying jobs that we so desperately need.

- Rep Jerry McNerney, D-Stockton, represents Mountain House and a sliver of northern Tracy as part of the 9th Congressional District.